DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 174 248 IR 007 532

AUTHOR Pasick, Adele
TITLE Annual Staff Conference of the Regina Public Library.
PUB DATE 2 Jun 77
NOTE 18p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Children; Interviews; *Library Services; *Public Libraries; Sex Differences; Social Change; Television Viewing
IDENTIFIERS *Canada; Library Users

ABSTRACT

This transcript of a presentation at the 1977 annual staff conference of the Regina Public Library discusses a children's services study conducted during the year and places it in the context of the total services of the library. Results of over 600 interviews with children concerning library use, television viewing habits, and differences between girls and boys in their library activities, are summarized, and the effects on children's services of changes in society, such as the information-seeking emphasis of school curricula and the influence of television, are considered. Modifications in both children's services and adult services are proposed in the conclusion. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED174248

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ANNUAL STAFF CONFERENCE OF THE REGINA PUBLIC LIBRARY

by

Adele Pasick

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ken Jensen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

IR007532

Dr. Adele Fasick

Annual Staff Conference of the Regina Public Library

June 2, 1977

I think that most of you have had a chance to look at the report of the Children's Services Study which Claire England and I did over the past year. What I want to do today is just briefly outline what we did in the study and put it into the context of the total services of the library. After that I'd like to answer any questions you may have about the study. There are copies of the study in the library now, and more will be available in two weeks, so I'll refer you to those for specific figures and findings.

Children's services have traditionally been a rather segregated part of the library. Historically, one of the reasons for starting a children's department was to tuck the children away where they wouldn't bother adults. In their separate room, children were to develop a love of good books, under the guidance of librarians who themselves knew and loved great literature. A subsidiary part of this was to protect children from premature exposure to adult books and the harsh realities of adult life.

To fulfill these purposes, children's librarians developed skills in selecting the best children's books for their collections, in telling stories, giving puppet shows, and providing other programs designed to introduce children to books and to make them into lifelong readers.

There are two major changes in society which have had a great effect on these purposes and may indicate that changes need to be made.

The first of these changes is the development during the last fifteen or twenty years of school curricula which depend on information seeking by children rather than on the use of textbooks. School libraries have been instituted to supply the need of children for a large range of informational materials, but many children also turn to public libraries for materials. At the same time, school libraries have taken over part of the role of public libraries in helping to introduce children to literature.

This change has meant that instead of standing as a unique community service in providing for the reading needs of children, the public library now has a partner in meeting these needs. And, like most partnerships, the different lines of responsibility are not always clear. The relationship between school and public libraries is a subject that is important to all of us.

Another major change which has affected children's library services is the development of television into a major media form - a source of both entertainment and information for children and adults alike. Children no longer need to know how to read in order to see adventures and fantasies played out before them. In one stroke this has eliminated much of the traditional reason for developing reading skills - to gain access to the wider world through books. Is reading necessary for today's children?

Besides satisfying entertainment needs, TV has opened up a wide area of information and a view of adult life. As we all know, children share with their parents the view of South Moluccan terrorists holding Dutch school children hostage, and Idi Amin proclaiming his intentions about taking over the Commonwealth. They also see Starsky and Hutch screeching their car around the streets of L.A. and Charlie's Angels using their charms to ferret out criminals. It's a far cry from Arthur Ransome's boys & girls building campfires on their island, or Mole and Ratty setting out for adventure on the river. Television has admitted children to the adult world of real violence and problems and to the exaggerated violence of adult fantasies.

When we came to set up this study, we wanted to find out why and how children used the library, if they used it, or why they didn't use the library. We wanted to know about their use of television, their newspaper, book and magazine reading, the clubs and teams which they belonged to and their use of the school library because these all seem to be factors that might influence their use of the library, or their attitude toward materials in the library.

We also used a standardized test of the children's self image to discover whether there is a difference in the way that children who use the library think about themselves when compared with children who do not use the library. We interviewed almost 600 children, half in the schools and half in libraries.

One of the questions which keeps coming up in most communities when librarians talk about children who use the library and those who do not is that there are particular socio-economic and ethnic groups who do not use the library. Our findings in the study were encouraging in this respect. There does not seem to be any particular group of children who do not use the library. While we were not allowed to ask questions about parental occupation or socio-economic background in our school sample, we did our interviewing in schools located in areas of varied economic levels, so we believe that the children in the schools represent a reasonable cross-section of the population of Regina.

Those children who were interviewed in the libraries (and these include virtually all of the children who used the libraries during the interviewing periods) seemed also to represent a cross-section of families in Regina. The occupations of their fathers were roughly divided in the same groups as those of all men in Regina. All of the sizeable ethnic groups were represented with no significantly high or low figures for different groups.

The one major difference in background we found between the school and library samples was that there are more girls who use the library than boys. This figure was borne out also by the circulation check that we used during the survey period. It seems that boys are the less-well-served minority group in the children's department, and quite likely in the adult departments too. This ties in with Sarah Landy's findings in her study of seventh graders, but it's not a good sign. Aside from the inherent in-

equity of failing to serve any group of people well, there is also the practical problem that men are apt to be over-represented in decision making positions in most communities, so an institution which serves them well is more likely to survive financial hardships than one which doesn't.

All right, then, the first question we had considered - was there any important difference between children who use the library and those who do not - seemed to be answered negatively. The children who do not use the library frequently seem in terms of their background to be very similar to the ones who do use the library, with the exception that more boys than girls are among the non-users. We talk about possible reasons for that later.

Another question we wanted to examine was the familiar one about whether or not the use of television had made children uninterested in books, reading, and the library. Are the children who come to the library the ones who do not watch television very much? The answer to that seems to be "no". We could find no difference at all in the amount of television viewing reported by children who use the library and those who do not.

Over 80 percent of the children report that they watch television a great deal - roughly five programs or more per day. Even those children who report that they read a great deal - that they are almost always in the process of reading a book - report that they also watch a great deal of television. Many of the most popular programs are the ones that are on at convenient times - the lunch hour programs, the after-school programs, which are the two times of day when children probably have control over the set (although there are a remarkable number of children whose families have two or more TV sets, which means that they can get complete coverage of TV in Regina). It seems likely that to many children, the television set is like wallpaper. They keep it on in the background even when they are reading or doing other things.

There were also no significant differences between the television programs which were chosen as favourites by library users and by the children in the schools. Juvenile shows, mostly cartoons, are popular among the younger children, but detective and adventure shows soon take the lead. Situation comedies are not favourites with younger children, but their popularity increases as children grow older.

The overwhelming use of television by children--there was only one girl we found whose family did not have at least one television set--means that we have to see this exposure to adult television--much of it violent, sophisticated, and fast-paced--as a background shared by virtually all of the children that we deal with. We have to look at our materials and services as complementary to the television which the children are viewing, but I don't think that we can blame a lack of interest in the library on the availability of television, because there are so many children who manage to make both television and books an important part of their lives.

One of the aspects of television that we asked about was whether children had ever read a book because of a television program which they saw. About half of the children said that they had been inspired to read a book because of television. The books ranged from Charlie Brown books and Star Trek books to Black Beauty and Planet of the Apes. Perhaps this aspect of television is one of the most important things for librarians to seize hold of--the ability of television to stimulate reading and possibly the use of the library.

Another reason sometimes cited for causing a decline in library use among children has been their over-organized lives. But here again, we found no significant difference in the number of clubs and teams to which children belong and their use of the library. At least in Regina, children seem to have enough unscheduled time to take advantage of the library if

they wish to. There were no children in the study who cited music lessons or church activities as taking up so much time that they couldn't go to the library.

The most marked difference between children who use the library and those who don't, is that library users read more. They not only read more books, they also read more magazines and newspapers; and they read more different sections of the newspapers, especially more news stories. Despite the availability of other forms of media in the library, reading and library use still seem to go together.

After looking at some of these general characteristics, the next step in our study was to look at the various publics which the children's department serves in the hopes of discovering ways in which they can be better served.

The range of library users in the children's department is probably greater than in the adult department of the library. These users range from illiterate preschoolers to sixth and seventh graders who may be reading at the level of a sophisticated university student. Supplying the needs of all these children is a difficult task, so we decided to look at different age groups of children who use children's services. We did not include preschoolers in the study, not because they are not an important group of users, but because of the difficulty of getting any expression of their views, and also because we felt that their use of the library is more a reflection of their parent's decisions than of any choice by the children. We divided our children into two age groups, the six to nine year olds and the ten to twelve year olds. These two groups correspond pretty closely to the division between the first three grades of school - the primary grades - in which reading skills are taught, and the intermediate grades - four through six - during which the children are supposed to have mastered basic reading and becoming capable of broadening their studies. Within each of these age groups we compared

the library sample with the school sample and also the boys with the girls. These seemed to be the most important divisions within the groups.

What are the six to nine year olds like? Well, the children we interviewed expressed an almost universal interest in books and in the library. They have an overwhelmingly favourable attitude toward the library, both its programs and materials. When they talk about library materials, they mention books much more than anything else. More than 90 percent of the children in the libraries named books as a reason for enjoying their trips to the library. Fewer than a quarter of them mentioned any kind of non-print materials as a reason for enjoying the library, even though they could give as many different reasons as they wanted to. Library programs, too, did not seem an important attraction, since less than ten percent of the children named these.

Even among children who do not go to the library very often, books remain the major item that they think of when they are asked about the library. Again, 90 percent of the children named books as a kind of material available in libraries, while less than 20 percent could name any other kind of material--magazines, records, toys, games. Almost two-thirds of the children in the school sample also did not know of any activities or programs in the libraries.

Since the major attraction of the library is books, most children would have to be interested in books to want to visit the library often. Fortunately, at this age, most of the children in both samples say that they enjoy reading and read books for pleasure quite often. But already there is a difference between girls and boys. In the school sample, the girls were just as likely to say that they read "often or always" as the children in the library sample, but among the boys, less than 50% gave this answer, and almost one boy in four said that he never or hardly ever read books aside from those he needed for school.

The biggest reason for not using the library among children of this age, is their dependence on adults to transport them. The reasons children gave for not visiting the library were things like "My mother doesn't have the car", "My father is always tired after work", or "My mother says it's too far to walk". Obviously, in order to get the maximum number of children of this age to use the library, we either have to make the library attractive enough for parents to want to go there themselves and take their children, or we need to take the library to the children by means of book trailers or more branches.

Those children who do use the library, tend to do so frequently. More than half of the children in the library said that they visited it at least once a week. When we put this together with the relatively greater amount of time available to children of this age - because of less homework, fewer athletic teams available, and a restricted ability to travel around the city by themselves, it seems clear that these children in the early grades of school should be encouraged to develop the habit of using the library frequently and regularly. Children under the age of ten are not sharply differentiated between library users and non-users; very few children have given up on books and reading at this time. We seem to have a willing audience who will come to the library if it is made easily accessible to them and they know about it.

When it comes to children ten years old and older, there is more of a split between children who use the library and those who do not, especially among the boys. The boys who use the library have significantly higher aspirations for their education and for their future jobs. More of the boys in the library than in the schools plan to go to university and to take a professional job. Whether or not they actually will do so is another question, of course. It would be a fascinating study to follow some of these children through the next ten years to see whether the use of the library was a predictor

of greater educational and professional achievement. If it is, that should spark interest in the library and increased support of the library among parents and teachers alike.

Girls over the age of ten do not seem to be so sharply differentiated between those who use and those who do not use the library. Their educational and vocational aspirations seem to be very similar for both groups. Part of this may be because the girls have much less varied occupational goals. Just as people from women's studies have been telling us for years, most girls plan to enter traditionally female occupations like nursing and teaching. These are the areas in which they see female role models, the ones which television as well as their daily life tell them women should be.

By the age of ten, then, a substantial number of boys seem to have decided that they do not like reading and fro many of them the library seems unimportant. Girls may be more satisfied with the library and use it despite their educational and occupational goals because they enjoy the recreational reading provided by the library.

Although the majority of children of all ages were interested in the library for recreational reading, girls were more interested than boys in this aspect. Girls tended to make longer visits to the library, and to go with friends rather than alone. It seems that many of the libraries serve a greater social function for girls than for boys. It is a place where they can spend an afternoon with their friends, choose books and discuss them, and no doubt feel comfortably at home. Boys make shorter library trips, more often use the catalogue to find what they want, and more often travel to the library alone. For these boys, the library is a functional place where they obtain some material which they want, but which they do not seem to use as a social centre.

In order to satisfy the varied use patterns of children, the library has to present several different faces. It cannot neglect the avid readers who already use the library, who enjoy spending time browsing through the

collections, who want to sit and talk quietly with their friends and who don't mind looking through eight or ten books in order to find two or three to take home.

We have to admit, however, that this kind of leisurely, comfortable library service is not equally appealing to all children. A fairly large proportion of children, especially boys, have decided by the age of ten or eleven that recreational reading is not very important to them. For the small number of books they want to read on their own, the school library or a paperback book rack will probably meet their needs. Their desire for vicarious excitement, adventure, and mystery is met by the television programs that they watch. If we want to keep these children as library users, we will have to meet needs that are not already met by television and for the most part these are informational needs.

Most of the children whom we interviewed, even the youngest ones, know that the library is a place where they can find out about something they want to know about. They are also aware that television is not a very useful source for specific information. While they no doubt absorb a great deal of knowledge about various subjects from television, they cannot find an answer when they want it - and children even more than adults want what they want whe they want it. They are unwilling to wait for weeks or months. The girl who said to us, for instance, "I'd really like to know what Greece is like and where it is because my father came from there and I've never seen it," might be lucky enough to see a program about Greece on TV some day, but would be much more likely to find what she wanted in the library at the time she wants it.

Modifications in Services

What do the results of our study mean in terms of planning for the library? No study, of course, can tell you how to run your library. All we did was to collect some specific information which we hope will help the

children's services people to set the goals and objectives for future library service.

One thing which you wouldn't want to change is the excellent service which is being given to a great many children now. Almost all of the children who use the library are happy with it and enjoy the materials they get.

But if the library wants to meet the needs of children who do not now use the library, some of the results of the study suggest ways in which this might be done. I'm only going to talk today in general terms about changing emphases, rather than specific suggestions.

First of all, it would seem that since children view the library mainly in terms of its collection rather than for its programs, the major emphasis should probably be in terms of developing collection-related services. Programs for preschoolers serve the purpose of bringing the library to the attention of parents who might not otherwise think of taking young children there. Once the children begin to make choices on their own, however, they do not seem to be greatly influenced in their use by the availability of programs.

This doesn't mean, of course, that programs should be abandoned, but merely that they should receive lower priority than collection development. There are ways of offering programs without using librarian's time, of course, such as using volunteers or using outside groups.

Secondly, children who do not now use the library might be attracted by a greater provision of mediocre material - cartoon books, televsiion spinoffs, and possibly comic books. Using this kind of material may attract children who are not particularly interested in reading as such. Presumably, if it is provided, it will be used as a come-on for material of more lasting value. If so, librarians would have to spend a good deal of time in helping the children who are not great readers and are not accustomed to using libraries. If collections of "sub-standard" materials are developed to any great extent, the purpose of buying this material ought to be spelled out for all of the staff,

and a selection policy ought to be agreed upon.

Information services may need to be emphasized even more than they are at present, both for current library users and for children who may be attracted to the library. This development would be in four areas--

1. Collections--build-up non-fiction collections in areas of great interest to children--we've mentioned some in the study. Concentrate on keeping currency in these materials. Build up periodical and non-print collections as information sources, since many children, especially the non-reader will prefer these to books, as Sarah Landy suggested in her talk yesterday.
2. Technical services--since information searching relies to a great extent on access, even for children, cataloging and indexing should be developed. This development calls for an increase in staff time, both to do the cataloging and also to help children develop the skills of searching for information. This should be a high priority for staff time, and of course it pays dividends for the adult section of the library as the children move into that area.
3. Reference services--This overlaps with the item I've just mentioned. In addition to helping children learn how to search for materials on their own, the children's librarians need to give priority to helping children who are seeking information. The more children come to see the library as a source of useful information, the greater the long-range benefits to the whole library.
4. Reader's advisory services--again, if an intensive effort is made to bring new users into the library, more staff time will have to be spent on helping these children find

Continuation (4)

4. material they need. Children with limited reading skills who are seeking information present a challenge. Non-print information materials are useful, but tend to take up more of the librarian's time than standard books do. Also, overcoming the lack of self-confidence and self-esteem which some children have developed because of their failures in school and especially in reading, means that more staff time must be spent in helping these children learn to cope with the library. Again, this should pay dividends for the whole library as the children grow up.

A third modification of library services which seems to be indicated, is the breaking down to some extent of the division between children's and adult's services. As I indicated earlier, children are introduced to the adult world by television at a very early age. The protective function of the children's room has of course become less and less important, but I'm not sure that all librarians are aware of the implications of this.

There needs to be a free flow of children between the children's and the adult's departments. This is especially important in the information aspects of library use. While the children's department may increase its holdings in informational materials, and may increase its reference service, the needs are undoubtedly going to spill over into adult services.

Since children are exposed to adult media in recreational materials too, more adult books and periodicals might be added to the children's collection. These might be particularly materials dealing with subjects of high interest such as television, music, and entertainment personalities and sports. Many of the children in our school sample did not expect to find in the library information about subjects that are not on the school curriculum. One way to attract them might be to increase holdings of this sort of material and publicize it.

One of the major differences between older children and adults in their use of the library is in behaviour rather than in the content of materials used. Both the children's department and adult services (this refers for the most part to the main library) probably need to increase their familiarity with the other department and to discuss things like behaviour, noise level, studying with friends, and other areas which might develop friction. Everyone has to make adjustments, but there is no longer really any hope of neatly segregating children into one area of the library and expecting them to be completely served there.

Modifications in Adult Services

Up until the last few minutes, I've been talking mostly about changes that might be made within the children's department itself, but now I'd like to mention some of the effects these might have on the rest of the library.

The book trailers, first of all, serve so many children that they are almost a part of children's services. They play a very important role for young children who are unable to travel to the main library or even to branches by themselves. However, if the main library and branches move toward more of an emphasis on information services, the book trailers will probably feel the effect of this change.

The trailers will perhaps increasingly be seen as an access point to the collection at large, rather than an entity in themselves. As soon as children are old enough to travel to a library by themselves, the trailers should encourage them to go by publicizing the availability of material in libraries, by telling them how to get to libraries, and in general by acting as an inducement to further library use. There needs to be increasing emphasis on the library as a system.

There may need to be more emphasis put on informational services within the trailer itself; this would depend, of course, on whether recreational

needs can also be met. There are a lot of policies and plans that would have to be worked on individually, but the key to it would be very close coordination between the children's services dept. and the booktrailers.

Technical services is another department that will undoubtedly feel changes if there is increasing emphasis on information services for children. I've mentioned before some of the changes that might be made--more subject headings, more complete cataloging. A greater emphasis on providing current material would increase pressure on the technical services people who no doubt already get enough "rush" orders from the adult services. But if we take children's needs seriously, we have to be ready to give them the same level of services that adults get.

Public Services in the adult department are likely to feel pressures in the use of reference services and access to services such as inter-library loan. Children are also likely to make great use of non-print materials as a normal part of their search for information, and this may lead to increasing pressure for integration.

Most librarians are busy enough already, and encouraging children to increase their demands on library services will only add to the work load. But it is apparent that children today, with their access to the adult media and the increasingly wide-ranging demands of school curricula cannot be confined within a narrow range of library materials and services. And it is these children, of course who will be the tax payers of the future deciding on library budgets. The time to convince people of the importance and relevance of library services is when they are young and still unprejudiced.

Alixe talked yesterday about the continuum of library services from provision of books for preschoolers up through adult services. I think we as librarians always have to keep in mind the interdependence of total library services. What goes on in the children's room today makes a difference to what goes on in the adult department tomorrow. Providing library services for

the whole community is a job that involves the entire library staff working together.

And now I'd like to answer any questions you might have about the study.